



PLANNING COMMISSION

Department of Urban Planning & Design • P.O. Box 27210 • Tucson, AZ 85726-7210

DATE: August 2, 2006

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Albert Elias, AICP, Executive Secretary

SUBJECT: *Groves Neighborhood Plan Amendment*
PA-06-02, Pantano/Escalante – Parking
Public Hearing (Ward 4)

Issue: This is a request by Don Laidlaw, on behalf of the property owner, Pantano/Escalante Associates (PEA), represented by Humberto S. Lopez and Danilo Lopez, to amend the *Groves Neighborhood Plan* to allow parking in an area designated for residential use. The approximately 2.2-acre plan amendment site is a narrow, elongated strip on the western side of Pantano Road, south of Escalante Road. To provide additional parking for their businesses at the southwest corner of Pantano and Escalante Roads, PEA caused a parking lot to be constructed on the northern half of the amendment site. They seek to remedy a zoning violation by first amending the land use plan and then rezoning the site from Suburban Residential (SR) to Parking (P) zoning.

A copy of the land use and zoning map is provided as Attachment A. A copy of an aerial photograph of the site and surrounding areas is provided as Attachment B. A copy of the plan amendment application is provided as Attachment C.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Planning Commission (Commission) forward this item to the Mayor and Council with a recommendation to amend the *Groves Neighborhood Plan* to allow parking on the subject property. A copy of the proposed Land Use Map is provided as Attachment D.

Groves Neighborhood Plan: Located directly north and east of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in south-central/southeast Tucson, the *Groves Neighborhood Plan* area comprises a one-square-mile area bounded by Escalante Road on the north, Irvington Road on the south, Pantano Road on the east and Kolb Road on the west. Since it was adopted in 1976, making it one of the City's earlier land use plans, the *Groves Neighborhood Plan* has been amended four times. None of the amendments are relevant to this amendment proposal.

Public Contact: Staff has not been contacted by any member of the public regarding this amendment proposal.

Planning Commission Study Session: The Commission discussed this item in a study session on July 19, 2006. Commissioner Williams asked about the widths of the cross-section components. Attachment E is a copy of a cross-section of the amendment site parking area. Commissioner Williams also asked if only one additional access is proposed, at the southern end of the amendment site, and if the Transportation Department (TDOT) had reviewed the proposed access. Mr. Laidlaw said he discussed it with TDOT's Traffic Engineering Section and they found it acceptable. The access to Dogwood Street will be designed as a left-turn only out of the parking area to Pantano Road, to discourage people from turning right and driving through the neighborhood. There are two median breaks in Pantano Road, at the Dogwood Street alignment and a short distance south, that provide opportunities for those leaving the parking lot via Dogwood Street to turn left and head north toward the Pantano/Escalante intersection. Attachment F is a copy of an aerial photo that shows the median breaks.

Prior to the Study Session, Commissioner Rex asked how many parking spaces are required, and how many have been provided. The buildings and associated parking lot were constructed in 1976 as a neighborhood commercial/retail center. *Land Use Code (LUC)* parking requirements were 1 space per 200 square feet of floor area, and that hasn't changed. When the land use changed to call centers, the required number of parking spaces decreased, to one space per 250 square feet of floor area. It is likely that the call centers satisfy the minimum *LUC* parking requirement. Because several shifts overlap, the actual number of parking spaces needed is greater than that required by the *LUC*, and PEA is taking steps to address that.

Commissioner Thomson said that if the site needs more parking, this specific commercial use may not be appropriate relative to the surrounding neighborhood. He also asked about land use plans for the vacant 6-acre SR-zoned parcel west of the call centers. The property owners, Pepper-Viner Development Company, recently submitted a proposal to rezone the site to R-2 for a 28-lot single-family residential subdivision.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Existing Zoning and Land Uses: The SR-zoned amendment site is approximately 84 feet wide and 1190 feet long. Tucson Electric Power Company (TEP) has an electric easement over the site, and electric power poles extend along its length. The northern half of the site has been converted to a parking lot, with one parking bay to the east and one to the west of a centrally-located 24-foot wide parking area access lane (PAAL). Directly north of the amendment site, at the southwest corner of Pantano and Escalante Roads, are the AFNI and INFO_{NXX} call center businesses owned by PEA. The amendment site parking lot is used by employees of these businesses. Based on phone conversations with both businesses, they operate from 3 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week.

Directly east of the amendment site is Pantano Road. Across Pantano to the east are Santa Rita High School, and, south of the school, the City of Tucson's Lincoln Regional Park. South of and adjoining the amendment site is Dogwood Street, a local street that provides access to the Pine Grove subdivision. Across Dogwood Street to the south is another phase of the Pine Grove subdivision. West of the amendment site is a 16-foot unpaved alley, and west of the alley are the rear yards of single-family residences in the Pine Grove subdivision. These neighbors would be most affected by this proposed land use change.

Land Use Plan Policy Summary: The *Groves Neighborhood Plan* supports residential land uses on this parcel, which was originally intended to be a landscape buffer for residential areas to the west. No *Plan* policies apply directly to the site, however, a *Plan* objective is to provide buffering to enhance the compatibility between different land uses.

General Plan policies support commercial uses adjacent to residential neighborhoods if the commercial use is designed so that it will be compatible with the residential use. Also, commercial uses may be expanded into adjoining residential areas if logical boundaries can be established, such as a street or drainageway, and if adequate screening and buffering of the residential properties can be provided.

All development should incorporate quality in design principles, so that the function and visual quality of the site and surrounding areas, including the streetscape, are improved. Policies encourage the planting of street trees to enhance the visual appeal of the streetscape and provide shade for pedestrians. Land use changes and design measures intended to reduce criminal activity are promoted. Policies encourage the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

Analysis: Background. Due to its elongated shape and the TEP power lines and poles, development opportunities for this site are limited. Over the years, there have been several proposals to develop it, however, the Groves-Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association (G-LPNA) has not supported them. PEA, although meeting the minimum *LUC* requirements for parking, needed additional parking for its call center employees. They bought the property and constructed a parking lot on approximately the northern half. In 2004, based on complaints from neighbors, a zoning violation (ZV) was issued.

Noise, Fumes and Site Appearance. A key issue is loud noise from car stereos and boom boxes after the end of shifts, when people gather to talk prior to leaving the site. This may also be an issue during break times. Because the AFNI and INFO_{NXX} call centers are open from 3:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., seven days a week, and as there are multiple shifts, this disruption occurs several times a day, early in the morning and late at night. A related issue is noise and fumes from the weekly testing of standby generators.

Other concerns voiced by the G-LPNA are about the site appearance. Debris was left over from the construction of the parking lot. Also, the neighbors requested that the parking lot frontage along Pantano Road be landscaped. Staff observed that the appearance of the

masonry wall east of the alley could be improved. The application indicates that PEA entered into an agreement with the G-LPNA to address their issues. Indications are that some of the issues have been addressed, and dialogue continues to resolve the remaining issues.

Access. Sole access to the parking lot on the amendment site is from Escalante Road, through the call center site. The amendment proposal allows vehicles to leave the site either by going north through the call center area to Escalante Road, or by going south to Dogwood Street.

Neighbors have two concerns. One is related to cut-through traffic in the neighborhood, and that was discussed at the study session. The exit to Dogwood Street will be designed as a left-turn only, directing people to Pantano Road. The other is that employees leaving via the Dogwood exit will block local neighborhood traffic. The feasibility of moving the access a bit further north on Pantano was evaluated, however, it was decided to leave it at Dogwood to minimize the likelihood of cut-through traffic.

Benefits to Neighbors. When the amendment site was vacant, it attracted unwanted uses. Also, over the years, neighbors have had problems due to proximity to Santa Rita High School. Students were crossing over to the western side of Pantano Road, and creating problems in the alleys behind the homes. PEA extended the walls along the south side of the call center site and the west side of the amendment site, which blocked access to the alleys. PEA has also helped with graffiti problems.

PEA's Need for Sufficient Parking. In order for the call centers to remain viable, adequate employee parking must be provided. The amendment site is the only place near the call centers that could provide additional parking.

Conclusion: PEA clearly needs more parking, and there aren't other locations directly adjacent to the call center site where parking can be provided. The *Groves Neighborhood Plan* and *General Plan* support parking on the amendment site if it, and the business it supports, can be designed and operated in a manner compatible with the adjacent neighborhood.

The neighbors have identified compatibility issues that need to be addressed. PEA has made progress addressing some of these issues, and discussion continues on resolving the outstanding ones. As a gesture of good will, PEA has successfully worked with the G-LPNA on other neighborhood issues unrelated to the call center. To allow parking on the subject site, the *Groves Neighborhood Plan* land use map needs to be amended. During the rezoning, conditions can be attached to enhance the site's compatibility with the neighborhood.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Zoning and Land Use Map
Attachment B – Aerial Photograph of Site and Surrounding Areas
Attachment C – Plan Amendment Application
Attachment D – Proposed Land Use Map, *Groves Neighborhood Plan*
Attachment E – Cross-Section of Parking Lot
Attachment F – Aerial Photograph Showing Median Breaks, Pantano Road

LAND USE PLAN POLICIES

Groves Neighborhood Plan

Objective 4 is to provide for a pleasant environment for each land use, buffered where necessary from adjacent incompatible uses.

General Plan

Element 2, Policy 3 is to protect established residential neighborhoods by supporting compatible development, which may include other residential, mixed-use infill, and appropriate nonresidential uses. Supporting Policy 3.9 is to support nonresidential uses ... where the scale and intensity of use will be compatible with adjacent uses, including residential development. Policy 5.6 is to consider the expansion of commercial areas into adjoining residential areas when logical boundaries, such as existing streets or drainageways, can be established and adjacent residential property can be appropriately screened and buffered.

Element 4, Policy 4 is to design and maintain streets to enhance their overall functional and aesthetic quality. Supporting Policy 4.9 is to promote the planting of street trees to provide shade for pedestrian and visual relief for the driver and bicyclist. Policy 5 is to promote neighborhood identity and visual character. Policy 6 is to promote quality in design for residential, commercial, industrial, mixed-use, and publicly-funded development. Supporting Policy 6.1 is for all development to incorporate environmentally-sensitive design that protects the integrity of existing neighborhoods, complements adjacent land uses, and enhances the overall function and visual quality of the street, adjacent properties, and the community.

Element 7, Policy 5 is to continue to maintain high quality and efficiency in police services to the extent that it is consistent with policies and finances of the City. Supporting policy 5.13 is to encourage crime prevention through the development and use

of specific design criteria, standards, codes, regulations, and development standards, such as “Safe by Design” guidelines.

Element 13, Policy 6 is to provide assistance and support for the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

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